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## GEORGE ALLISON HENCH.

**In Memoriam.**

A cruel accident has struck down one of the associate editors of the JOURNAL, the gifted and lovable Professor Hench, of the University of Michigan. It is right that a fitting word be spoken here in his memory, but what can one say in presence of such a mad fatality that cuts down ere the noontide of life a scholar of such noble promise and a man so indispensable to his friends? What can one say who wishes to think that life is good and the world well ordered?

Trübe Frage,  
Der das Schicksal sich verummt.

All we can do is sadly to record the brief story of his life, recall in kindly candor (as he would have wished) what manner of soul he was, and then,—bid him farewell.

After an unusually laborious year at Ann Arbor, protracted into August by lectures in the summer school, Professor Hench went to the White Mountains to recuperate. He was not in good health. An illness contracted abroad in the summer of 1897 was followed by a lingering and intractable neuritis which partly paralyzed the muscles of his neck and right arm, reduced his strength and caused him much suffering. This sudden break-down of a robust physique gave great anxiety to his friends, though he himself persistently declined to be regarded as an invalid. At the close of the academic year he seemed to be improving in health, but prudence would certainly have counselled a complete cessation of work during the summer. It was not easy for him to be prudent, however, when his keen professional conscience suggested work to do. He had not learned to think of himself as seriously in danger, although he had been warned in divers ways, among others by occasional slight attacks of vertigo.

The fatal accident occurred on the 12th of August, as he was cycling with an Ann Arbor colleague on the road leading from the Profile House to Franconia, N. H. His friend, Dr. Dock, had ridden ahead down a long but not very steep incline, when he missed his companion whom he had last seen coming up the crest of the hill. Returning to investigate, he presently met Professor Hench walking beside his wheel and showing in his face the marks of a fall. In reply to inquiry he made light of his mishap, as wheelmen will, but was evidently half dazed; he could not tell what had happened, though he had walked

half a mile from the probable place of the accident. At the request of his companion who is a physician, he lay down to permit an examination of his injured forehead; during the examination he sank into a complete unconsciousness which lasted for several hours while he was being cared for at a neighboring hotel. After a while he seemed to rally and again talked a little, though with imperfect command of his faculties. When it became evident that there had been a serious injury of the brain, he was conveyed to a Boston hospital for the operation of trephining. But the operation brought no relief; it was followed by a coma which ended in death about noon on the 16th of August. He had fallen, so his companion thinks, in a sudden vertigo, and had been unable, through the weakness of his arm, to protect his head by the usual involuntary motion. The accident—an exceedingly comminuted fracture of the roof of the right orbit, with consequent slow effusion of blood into the brain,—was necessarily fatal. There was no hope in surgery from the first.

The deceased scholar was not quite thirty-three years old at the time of his death, having been born October 4, 1866. His birthplace was the village of Centre, Perry Co., Pa., where his father carried on a large tannery. He was a bookish child, who began going to the country school before he was five years old and at eight was equal to a rapt perusal of *Pilgrim's Progress*. In 1874 the family removed to Carlisle, where George was sent to the preparatory school of Dickinson College and later, for one year, to the College itself. In the autumn of 1882 he joined the sophomore class of Lafayette College, from which he received the degree of A.B. three years later. A vague plan of going to Alaska as a teacher was nipped in the bud by Professor March, who had interested him in Germanic studies. On the advice of March, of whom he was wont to speak with great affection, he entered the Johns Hopkins University, in 1885, as graduate student of German and English. In the summer of 1887 he attended courses at the University of Berlin, and the following summer he spent at Vienna, working on Old High German manuscripts in the Imperial Library. In June, 1888, he was awarded the Fellowship in German at the Johns Hopkins University, and in the following year received the degree of Ph.D. He had become interested in the Old High German Isidor and felt the need of a preliminary study of the Monsee Fragments. Having chosen this latter subject for his doctoral thesis, he made a new and careful collation of the manuscript and a thorough philological study of the text. His work was published by Trübner in 1890 as a Baltimore dissertation, under the title of *The Monsee Fragments. Newly collated text, with notes and a grammatical treatise*. In 1891 a second edition appeared, identical with this in the first 142 pages but augmented by 67 pages of glossary. The larger work upon Isidor was published in 1893 as Heft 72 of *Quellen und*

*Forschungen.* It bears the title: *Der althochdeutsche Isidor. Facsimile-Ausgabe des Pariser Codex nebst kritischem Texte der Pariser und Monseer Bruchstücke. Mit Einleitung, grammatischer Darstellung und einem ausführlichen Glossar.*

I am not an Old High German specialist and if I were, I should not have the heart to attempt here anything like a critical comment upon these two works with which Dr. Hench began a scholarly career that is now so sadly and prematurely ended. Being mainly concerned with minute questions of diplomatics, of phonology, morphology and textual criticism, they belong to a class of writings in which details are everything; and this is not the place for a consideration of details. In taking up these studies he entered a field which the scholars of this country (a land not rich in Old German manuscripts) have for the most part been content to leave to their colleagues across the sea. It is therefore sufficient praise to say that he was at once recognized by German specialists as a well-equipped Fachmann who had a perfect right to be working with them on the frontier. While this or that conclusion of his may be debatable (this is the fate of all scholarly work), it is difficult to see how his general spirit and method could have been better. It is fortunate for the reputation of American scholarship that our pioneer in the Old High German field showed such signal ability and set such a high standard of philological craftsmanship. Dr. Hench was an enthusiast in his specialty and he loved scholarship for its own sake. He had almost a passion for accuracy and no question that came fairly in his way was ever too minute to be investigated.

My own intercourse with him dates from the summer of 1890, when, in reply to a letter of mine, he cabled me from Vienna that he would accept an instructorship in German at the University of Michigan. Arrived in Ann Arbor, he soon won general regard by his scholarly enthusiasm, his earnestness as a teacher, and his genial, amiable personality. And yet he was not at first an ideal teacher of undergraduates. Like many a young specialist fresh from Germany, he did not easily judge aright the mental stature of his pupils and would often fire over their heads. Besides this he lacked the gift of lucidity and would sometimes tangle himself up hopelessly in the effort to explain something that he understood all too well. It was not the result of loose thinking in his case, but of a too eager attempt to carry along with him all the aspects, qualifications and corollaries of his thought at the same time. His discourse used to remind me now and then of those wonderful German periods with which we are all so familiar,—Gothic cathedrals of syntax, as a recent essayist proudly calls them. But he was a keen critic of himself; he had none of that deadly self-complacency with which heaven so often endows those whom it does not really intend for teachers. He wished very earnestly to become a

good teacher and he speedily became one. He manifested deep interest in general questions of educational policy, was always in favor of the highest possible standards, and soon became an efficient counselor not only with regard to the organization of work in his own department, but with regard to the manifold administrative questions that take so much of the time and energy of the American professor. After a year's service he was made Assistant Professor of German, and in 1896 Professor of the Germanic Languages and Literatures. During the past year, in addition to the duties of his own position, he had general charge of the department of Romance languages, pending the appointment of a successor to the lamented Walter.

Dr. Hench had a great capacity for friendship and was an eminently social nature, but he never married; when rallied upon that subject he would say, half dolefully, that he was wedded to his books. And in these indeed he existed. Not that he lacked interest in the general intellectual life of the time, or sympathy for other pursuits than his own. He had both these in generous measure, but he had found out what he himself could do—was ihm gemäss war, as Goethe puts it,—and he chose to cleave to this and content himself, as far as the general turmoil of opinion is concerned, with the role of a mildly cynical observer. His general temper inclined to pessimism, but bitterness of any kind was utterly foreign to his nature.

In his own field he was—I think I may say it and that his manes will not hear it with displeasure—abnormally conscientious. I have never known a man who took questions of scholarship, of teaching, of educational policy, more seriously; none who was more eagerly bent upon getting the best possible light and doing everything in the right way. He could be at times a little importunate in pressing his opinions, and was ever in his element when it was a question of showing how some seemingly unimportant matter was after all of far-reaching moment. His great love of precision and the strenuous methods that he brought to his own work made him very impatient of random firing and dubious generalization. While himself a linguistic philologist, he became more and more interested in the teaching of literature as such, and he used to dilate upon the importance of a broad conception of philology. He felt that if the letter killeth, it killeth only such as deserve to die, and that if the spirit giveth life, it giveth life only to such as have first trained their sense of language and form. That any one could think philology in any phase of it dull was to him the token of an ill-balanced mind. In his teaching he quietly assumed that what was a joy to him must be so for his advanced students. And they usually found it so, for enthusiasm begets enthusiasm. At the same time he refused to condescend to their frailty. My business, he would say, is to give the best thought and the latest results of my science; if my students do not fully understand me, very well. They will have

something to climb up to, and climbing is the very exercise they need. It was a favorite thesis of his, upon which I have more than once heard him expatiate with a sardonic gleam of the eye, that a University professor must not try too hard to be interesting.

After the publication of his *Isidor* he thought for some time of undertaking an *opus magnum* in the shape of an Old High German dictionary. When this plan was given up he used to talk of spending a year at Copenhagen, preparatory to some work in the Scandinavian field—perhaps a treatise on Germanic mythology. His mind teemed with projects for scientific work. With the enlargement of his professional responsibility, however, he had less time for his favorite pursuits of scholarship and took up with characteristic energy the study of pedagogical questions. The unfortunate trip to Germany, alluded to above, was undertaken for the purpose of looking into the teaching of modern languages on behalf of the Committee of Twelve, which was appointed three years ago on his motion by the Modern Language Association. The study was frustrated by his illness, and the impaired health of the past two years prevented him from doing what he was eager to do in this and in other directions. Nevertheless he bravely did what he could and his help was of great value to the Committee.

Dr. Hench was deeply interested in the prosperity of the JOURNAL OF GERMANIC PHILOLOGY, kept its interest ever at heart, and often expressed his regret at not being able to do for it all that he would have liked to do. He loved sound scholarship wherever it might be found, but most of all, of course, in the field to which he had devoted his life.

For reasons that are clear enough from what has been said above, his minor contributions to Germanic scholarship have not been very numerous in recent years, and I shall make no attempt to enumerate or characterize them. Notwithstanding his eager appetite for work and his restless energy of mind, fate willed that he should do but little of what it lay in him to do. His life-work is a fragment, a brilliant beginning followed by an untimely end. Had he lived, much might have been expected from him in the way of scholarly achievement and quickening influence. His death is a sad loss to scholarship. Scholarship, however, is only a cold abstraction. It goes on and on, with ever new hands and brains to do its work. It knows no sinking of the heart, no faltering for memory and for tears. Not so with us who have lost a friend and must henceforth think of a mere void where a little while ago there was a genial, earnest and high-minded fellow-pilgrim. We may surely be pardoned if, as we say farewell and pronounce once more our helpless *Über Gräber vorwärts*, we think less of the blighted career than of the broken bond of precious friendship.

CALVIN THOMAS.